

# **Kursk: The Turning Point on the Eastern Front in World War II**

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On the night of 5 August 1943 Muscovites awakened to the thunderous report of 125 field guns firing in unison. The twelve volleys constituted Stalin's first victory salute of the war, honoring the liberation of Belgorod and Orel. The wresting of these key cities from the German Army marked the end of the Wehrmacht's Kursk offensive on the Eastern front. These victory salutes continued, without interruption, until the fall of Berlin.[1]

The vastness and topography of the Russian Steppe was ideally suited for armored warfare on a grand scale. The battles on the eastern front in World War II saw the deployment of thousands of tanks and millions of men. In this theatre of operations the German army suffered eighty percent of its casualties. Historians of World War II agree the war was won in the east, but they still dispute when the fighting turned in favor of the Red Army. Their debate focuses on the Stalingrad and Kursk campaigns, fought from summer 1942 through winter 1943. This essay addresses this question, weighing in on the side of the Kursk campaign. Its approach is comparative and begins with a brief historical background of the engagements, followed by an examination of military and diplomatic aspects of these campaigns.

The German summer offensive of 1942 began in the south on 28 June over a wide front. The main axis of advance extended from the Voronezh area to Rostov and employed five armies. "The schwerpunkt [point of attack] of the operation was initially with Army Group Weichs, which comprised three armies including the Fourth Panzer Army." [2] The plan called for the Fourth Panzer Army to drive south along the Don River, behind the Russian forces, while the First Panzer Army, situated near Rostov, swung north behind the Russian line. "The objective was to prevent an orderly Soviet withdrawal, force the Russians away from the south bank of the Don, and cut them off, in a repetition of a maneuver that had been successfully employed several times in 1941." [3] The Second Army struck towards Voronezh, anchoring the north end of the front; the Sixth Army drove through the Don basin for Stalingrad; while the Seventeenth Army pushed for Rostov.

As planned, the offensive began with rapid advances reminiscent of the campaigns of the previous year; within a month, on 27 July, the Russians evacuated Rostov without a fight. Meanwhile the Panzer Armies smashed through and began encircling the thinly spread Soviet Sixty-Second Army defending the Don River basin. As a counter measure the Soviets sent the First Tank Army striking out from the left bank of the Don towards Kalach, threatening the flank of the Fourth Panzer Army. "The . . . counter-stroke did not lead to the routing of the German forces which had broken through the Don but, as later events demonstrated, it frustrated the enemy's plan of encircling and annihilating the Soviet Sixty-Second Army." [4] The Russians had

learned to fight a withdrawal. This campaign would not be a repeat performance of the blitzkriegs of 1941; the Germans would seize territory, but few prisoners.

The goals the German High Command set for the drive south were threefold: the capture of "the Caspian oil fields, the cutting of the Volga as a maritime artery, and the neutralization of the industrial center of Stalingrad." [5] These far-reaching plans forced the Germans to split their forces: the Seventeenth Army swung southwest towards the oil fields at Maikop, the First Panzer Army headed south into the Caucasus towards Astrakhan and Grozny, and the Fourth Panzer Army swung southeast to cover the First Panzer Army's northern flank and bring pressure to bear on Stalingrad. "The diversion of forces and supplies to the advance into the Caucasus had left the Sixth Army stranded for ten days without gasoline needed to move forward." This delay would cost the Sixth Army dearly in its attempts to take Stalingrad by storm. [6]

Up to this point the German advance met only limited resistance, because Stalin overestimated the Wehrmacht's operational capabilities. Stalin "assumed that the Germans would be capable of waging major offensives in two strategic sectors. . . . he was most concerned about the Moscow sector, where the Germans had massed seventy divisions." [7] However, the German offensive was limited to the southern front, because of a shortage of men and materiel to renew the fighting throughout the eastern front. Despite rapid German advances through the Don basin and the Caucasus, Stalin maintained:

The German advance southwards, towards the oil districts, had an auxiliary purpose; not only, and not so much, to capture the oil districts as to divert our main reserves to the south and weaken the Moscow front, and thereby facilitate the success of the blow at Moscow. [8]

By the end of August as the German Sixth Army fought its way into Stalingrad's suburbs, Stalin finally became convinced of the importance of the German drive south and released the Twenty-Fourth Army, the First Guards Tank Army, and the Sixty-Sixth Army to stem the advance. These forces constituted the bulk of the Soviet Union's reserves. [9] Stalin also transferred his most trusted commander, Deputy Supreme Commander Georgi Zhukov, from the Moscow to the southern front. According to Zhukov:

It was clear to me that the battle of Stalingrad was of the utmost military and political importance. The fall of the city would enable the German command to cut off the south of the Soviet Union from the rest of the country. We might lose the great waterway of the Volga River, on which a heavy flow of goods was moving from the Caucasus.

The Supreme Command had moved everything it had, except for the newly formed strategic reserves intended for subsequent operations, in the Stalingrad area. [10]

In the streets of Stalingrad the German Sixth Army's advance ground to a halt. In the Don River basin the Sixth Army's daily advances were measured in kilometers; in the rubble of Stalingrad they were measured in meters. "By the middle of October, the Russians were holding only three small bridgeheads" on the bank of the Volga. [11] On 11 November General von Paulus's Sixth Army launched a final assault to drive the remnants of General Chuikov's Sixty-Second Army into the icy Volga. Von Paulus committed seven divisions including his reserves, and in places

the attack "reached the Volga along a front of about 550-650 yards." [12] The Sixty-Second Army had been shattered, but with its back to the Volga, it held.

The Sixty-Second Army's defense of Stalingrad bought time for the Soviet High Command to assemble reserves to be used for a counter offensive. "On paper . . . the Russians had a manpower reserve of up to 1,700,000 able-bodied men, but for various reasons these could only be made available gradually to the combat units." [13] On 19 November the Red Army struck north and south of Stalingrad, catching Germany and her allies by surprise. In the north "the Southwest Front's infantry opened a path for Fifth Tank Army to break through the Rumanian Third Army," which ceased to exist after a day's combat. [14] In the south the Stalingrad Front swept through the Rumanian the Fourth Army. The pincers " . . . met about ten miles southeast of Kalach [about 40 miles west of Stalingrad]. The whole German Sixth Army, most of the divisions in the the Fourth Panzer Army, and some of what was left of the Third and the Fourth Rumanian Armies were surrounded." [15] In all nearly 300,000 Axis troops were trapped in the Stalingrad pocket.

In December and January the German position along the Don River became critical despite attempts to break the Soviet ring around Stalingrad. On 21 November, Field Marshal Erich von Manstein was ordered to command the newly formed Army Group Don, situated in the Don-Volga area. "Reinforced by a number of new divisions, it was expected to make a relief assault. . . [t]he push was to reach the encircled [Sixth] Army and thereafter restore the whole situation." [16] On 12 December Colonel-General Hermann Hoth's XLVII Panzer Corps with 232 tanks "opened its attack from the Kotelnikovo area, aimed north-eastwards to cover the sixty miles and so burst through the Soviet encirclement to link up with the Sixth Army." [17] Four days later the Soviets launched a potentially more devastating offensive in the middle Don sector between Army Groups A and Don. By this time Hoth's relief force had fought its way across the Myshkova River, covering more than half the distance to the encircled forces, but it "lacked the strength to negotiate the last thirty miles. [Hoth] believed that if the Sixth Army broke out he could still make a junction with it." [18] The Sixth Army, however, did not budge; Hitler ordered von Paulus to stand fast in Stalingrad. The new Soviet offensive cut through the Italian Eighth Army, driving headlong for Rostov. Manstein siphoned troops from Hoth's force to counter this new threat, but to no avail. The initiative was "now firmly in Soviet hands [and] the fate of nearly 300,000 men trapped in the Stalingrad pocket paled in comparison with the development of an enormous threat to Army Groups A, B and Don. Manstein might prejudice one army group in order to rescue Sixth Army, but not three." He thus ordered a general withdrawal from the Caucasus. [19] Sixth Army held out until 2 February. German troops came to call the summer campaign of 1942 "'Kaukasus-hin und Zuruck'--Caucasus round trip." [20]

On 15 January the Soviets launched the final stage of their winter offensive. Manstein's forces were in full retreat and conditions were "favorable for expanding the offensive on all fronts in the southwest." [21] The Voronezh and Steppe Fronts went into action and made short work of the Hungarian Second Army. The Soviet armies tore open a 175-mile-wide hole and advanced rapidly; within two weeks they had retaken Kursk and, by the middle of February, seized Kharkov. The Russian advance "pointed ominously towards the Dnieper crossing at Zaporozhe, the main supply center for Army Group Don." [22] Manstein responded to this threat by shortening the German defense line with an evacuation of Rostov, "and [taking] up a much

shorter front along the Mius River . . . the original starting point of the 1942 offensive."[23] This maneuver freed up divisions for a counterstroke. As the Soviet spearheads advanced towards the Dnieper River, Manstein readied the armored formations of the Fourth Panzer Army, the bulk of which were S. S. divisions. Manstein was not overly worried by the deep Soviet penetrations of his front. He "explained that the farther the Russian masses advanced to the west and southwest, the more effective would be his counter stroke." [24] Manstein unleashed his forces when the Soviet armored formations had nearly reached the end of their offensive capabilities. The Soviet Sixth and First Guards Armies, as well as an armored force commanded by General Popov, were caught by surprise and routed, a mere twenty miles from the Dnieper. On 15 March the Germans retook Kharkov. "Thus the Russian victories, although massive, were not decisive and the Germans were able to regain the initiative and hold much of the Donets basin." [25]

The bitter fighting in the Kharkov-Orel-Belgorod area left a large salient in the German line about one hundred miles deep and one hundred fifty miles across; in the center of this bulge was the city of Kursk. In April, as the fighting at the front wound down due to the annual thaw, it became clear to both sides that the Kursk bulge would be the site of the next great clash of arms. Accordingly, the Soviets and Germans made vast preparations for the coming summer offensive. The Germans began to rebuild their shattered army in the east even as the battle for Kharkov raged. On 9 March, Hitler issued a directive "aimed at increasing manpower by 800,000," [26] which along with the transfer of divisions from the west brought Wehrmacht field strength in Russia "to 3,100,000 while the OKW theatre [Western Europe] . . . was to drop to 1,300,000 men." [27] In recognition of the need for more armored formations, Hitler, on 22 January 1943, classified the expanded tank program as the task of highest priority. [28] And he "ordered that German tank production be increased to a capacity of 600 units per month." [29] These preparations allowed the Germans to amass more than 900,000 troops, 2,700 tanks and 2,000 aircraft around the Kursk bulge. [30]

The Soviets prepared for Kursk by building a defense in depth "from west to east to some 250-300 kilometers." [31] These defenses were so extensive because "Russian intelligence was aware of almost every detail . . . [of] the planned attack on the Kursk salient." [32] They were kept abreast of German plans by the Lucy spy ring, which insured that "copies of operations order number six [the plans for Kursk] reached Zhukov and other Russian leaders before the same operations order was received by German army field commanders." [33] Soviet defense works consisted of two zones from three to five miles in depth, buttressed with numerous fortified antitank positions. Each zone consisted of three defensive belts, "lying before and extending between each belt of fortifications were some of the most intensive mine fields ever laid, averaging more than five thousand antitank and antipersonnel mines for each mile of defensive zone." [34] In addition, the armies dug more than six thousand miles of trenches, "equal to a trench that would extend from the west coast of the United States all the way to England." [35] Inside the fortified ring around Kursk the Soviets deployed the Central Front under General Rokossovskiy and the Voronezh Front under General Vatutin, while behind the salient was the Steppe Front, which served as a strategic reserve. In all, the Soviets committed 1.9 million men, almost 4,000 tanks and more than 3,000 aircraft. [36]

The German plan called for two great armored pincers, one in the north, the other in the south, to cut through these formidable defenses and meet east of Kursk, cutting off the Soviet forces in the

salient. Colonel-General Model commanded the Ninth Army in the north in the Orel area and Colonel-General Hoth led the the Fourth Panzer Army in the south around Belgorod. Attached to the Fourth Panzer Army was Task Force Kempf, which was to cover the the Fourth Panzer Army's flank. German planning placed great confidence in the superiority of the new heavy tank the Panther V, and the two new super-heavy tanks, the Tiger and the Ferdinand, which were deployed for the first time in large numbers. These new weapons brought with them new tactics, most notably the *Panzerorgel*[tank bell], "with super-heavy tanks in the center, medium tanks to the right and left in a widening arch, light tanks behind the center and held ready for pursuit." [37] The Germans felt that this was the best formation to confront a wide front. The offensive was scheduled to begin in the early morning hours of 5 July but in the south General Hoth's the Fourth Panzer Army got off to an early start. Hoth wanted to "reshape' the front lines prior to attack, [so] he could launch his major blow with forces arranged to his advantage. Twelve hours before operation Citadel was scheduled to begin, German forces opposite Vatutin's Voronezh front plunged into action." [38] The Fourth Panzer Army, spearheaded by the II S. S. Panzer Corps, struck north along a thirty-mile front. "The two corps got off to a flying start, cutting through Vatutin's first line in two hours." Ninth Army's main assault followed the Orel-Kursk rail line south on a thirty-five-mile front. "By the end of the first day it had broken Rokossovskiy's first line and had penetrated the second in the zone of the main effort." [39]

The German offensive, despite initial successes, lasted less than a week. Model's northern pincer advanced a mere twelve miles before coming to a halt. The Ninth Army's offensive was spearheaded by the mighty Ferdinand tanks, whose two hundred millimeters of frontal armor were "electrically driven, with an eighty-eight millimeter L70 cannon in a fixed turret, as in an assault gun. Apart from this single long-barreled gun, it possessed no other armament and so was valueless for fighting in close-range. This was its great weakness, despite its thick armor plating and its good gun." Model possessed ninety of these behemoths, which were organized into "a panzer regiment of two battalions, each with 45 tanks." [40] The Ninth Army penetrated the Soviet defenses on a narrow front the "main thrust [had] narrowed down to a ten-mile sector." [41] Model's furthest advance was "the prepared positions on the Sredne-Russki heights, the high ground some twelve miles inside the northern face of the salient." [42] Here the Ferdinands broke through, but in the process they had become separated from their infantry and light-armor support. The Ferdinands roamed the rear areas of the Russian defense zone and fell prey to the Red Army foot soldier:

Russian infantrymen shouted their cries of attack and clambered aboard the Ferdinands as they lumbered over the ground. There the Russians secured footholds and brought the nozzles of flamethrowers to the ventilation slits of the German monsters. One long blast of flame and the Ferdinand was done, its crew choked to death through flame inhalation or burned alive. Those who managed to throw open their hatches in a frenzied attempt to escape were cut to ribbons by the massed guns pointed at them. [43]

In the south, the Fourth Panzer Army's offensive was only marginally more successful, advancing twenty-one miles to the village of Prokhorovka. Here, on 12 July, Hoth planned to break out by destroying "General Katukov's armored forces on the neck of land of Prokhorovka before the Soviet Steppe Front Army Group could bring up fresh reserves and intervene in the battle." [44] Hoth was counting on Task Force Kempf "to intercept the Soviet Fifth Guards Tank

Army, and prevent it from linking up with Katukov's Army." [45] Kempf failed and Hoth's push at Prokhorovka met a larger-than-expected Soviet armor force. The two sides were roughly equal with 1,500 tanks between them, except that Hoth's force included "more than 100 of the powerful Tiger heavy tanks." [46] General Pavel Rotmistrov's Fifth Guards Tank Army held the high ground as Hoth's Panzer's approached. Rotmistrov quickly realized "the powerful long-range guns of the Tigers [were] exceedingly dangerous, and the Soviet tanks had to try to close with them as quickly as possible to eliminate this advantage." [47] The Fifth Guards Tank Army charged headlong down the heights into the German tank armada, breaking up the solid formations of heavy and medium tanks; the battlefield at Prokhorovka quickly degenerated into a swirling melee.

Where the Tigers and the Panthers could traverse their turrets and put to good use their long-barreled high-velocity guns, they carried out a savage execution of their quarry. . . . But there was little opportunity for the German tanks to stand off and cut their enemy to pieces. The T-34s were faster, they were being handled with remarkable spirit and skill. . . . the lesser gun of the T-34, at ranges of a hundred yards and less, lost nothing in its ability to rip open even the thick armor covering the Tiger or the Panther. [48]

The engagement at Prokhorovka halted the German advance from the south and allowed the Soviet Supreme Command to launch its counter offensive. On 12 July in the north, Model's Ninth Army was hit on three sides by the Soviet Central, Bryansk, and Western Fronts. The Ninth Army fielded 600,000 men and 1,200 tanks. They were hit by a combined total of 1,250,000 Soviet troops, supported by 3,000 tanks. [49] After hard fighting, the Western Front broke through north of Bolkhov, while the Central Front seized Kromy. Model, fearful of being encircled, ordered a withdrawal from the Orel area. Orel fell on 5 August, and two weeks later Soviet forces "had reached the powerful German defense line 'Hagen,' where they were stopped. During the 37-day offensive the Soviets had advanced 150 kilometers." [50]

In the south the *counter offensive* began on 3 August. The Voronezh and Steppe Fronts, totaling close to a million men with 2,400 tanks, hammered the remnants of the Fourth Panzer Army and Task Force Kempf. The battered German line was held by 300,000 troops and a mere 600 tanks. [51] In the first day's fighting Tomarovka and Borisovka fell, opening the way for General Vatutin's two tank armies, "which moved rapidly forward . . . and cut off the escape routes of the Belgorod group." [52] Belgorod fell on 5 August, opening the way for a push towards Kharkov, which the Germans evacuated on 22 August to avoid being trapped. The following day Soviet troops entered Kharkov, ending the *counter offensive* at Kursk. German losses were considerable at 500,000 men and more than 2,000 tanks. [53]

The resounding victory at Kursk allowed the Soviet Supreme Command to launch offensives in the south in September to liberate the Ukraine. Soviet Armies stormed German defensive positions along the Dnieper River, seizing Kiev, Dnepropetrovsk, and Zaporozhe. In bitter battles, the Soviets pushed their fronts deep into the Ukraine, isolating the Crimea. "By the end of 1943, two-thirds of the Soviet territory occupied by the Germans had been liberated, and the Russians were approaching the borders of their eastern European neighbors." [54]

The Stalingrad and Kursk campaigns were inextricably linked by the ebb and flow of offensives and *counter offensives* that typified combat on the eastern front. These two great engagements occurred a mere five months apart and together doomed the German army in the east. This essay recognizes the role both campaigns played, but maintains that the fighting turned inexorably in favor of the Soviet Union as a result of the Russian victory at Kursk. This becomes apparent from a careful examination of four aspects of the campaigns: the net movement of the front to the west, German losses in men and materiel, change of the strategic initiative, and Soviet diplomatic ventures, which reveal the Soviet leadership's views of the situation at the front.

The Kursk Campaign resulted in a greater net movement of the eastern front to the west than did the engagement at Stalingrad. In 1942 the German Army attacked towards the Caucasus along a line running slightly east of Orel, Kursk, and Kharkov and as far south as the Sea of Azov; the German offensive penetrated deep into the Caucasus and as far east as the shores of the Volga River. The Soviet winter offensive, which encircled the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad, and the "great enveloping movement . . . into the German rear . . . [cleared] the Caucasus and the Ukraine so that the great German 1942 summer offensive was thrown back to its starting point." [55] At Kursk, however, the Germans were unable to break through. Correspondingly, the numerous Soviet offensives forced the Germans "to give up hundreds of miles of ground, and by the end of the year [they] had withdrawn behind the Dnieper," resulting in a net movement of the front to the west. [56]

Manpower losses, suffered by the Wehrmacht in the destruction of the Sixth Army at Stalingrad and the failed offensive at Kursk, proved insurmountable. "Between November 1942 and October 1943 the *Ostheer* [German Army in the east] sustained well over a million and a half casualties of whom close to 700,000 were permanently lost." [57] The severe losses suffered at Stalingrad and during the ensuing Soviet winter offensive were mitigated by "the 800,000-man draft ordered in January 1943, [which] brought in about 580,000 men." [58] The simple fact that the Germans were able to assemble a force of 900,000 troops for the Kursk Campaign underscored the Wehrmacht's ability to make good its Stalingrad losses; the losses suffered at Kursk, however, were a different matter. Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels expressed concern about the extensive German casualties sustained at the height of the Soviet *counter offensive* in the middle of October 1943:

We just cannot stand such a drain for long. When we consider that our eastern campaign has cost us 3,000,000 casualties-men killed, missing, or wounded-nobody can deny that we have paid exceedingly heavily for this campaign. . . . At some point or other we simply must try to get out of this desperate bloodletting. [59]

The German casualties at Kursk, coming as they did on the heels of the losses sustained at Stalingrad the year before, proved devastating. "Losses over the whole of the eastern front between 1 July and 10 October totaled a million men, of which only a half could be replaced." [60] By December the German army in the east had hit its lowest level: its "overall strength was down . . . to just over 2,000,000 soldiers." [61]

Materiel losses in 1942, though considerable, also constituted a fraction of those inflicted at Kursk. Increased tank production in early 1942 not only made good the Stalingrad losses, but

allowed the Germans to amass 2,700 tanks at Kursk; this represented nearly seventy percent of the armor on the eastern front.[62] German armor losses at Kursk were so excessive that they are pegged at 2,900 vehicles, surpassing the number deployed.[63] This discrepancy aside, German armor had clearly received a mortal blow at Kursk. According to Guderian:

The armored formations, reformed and re-equipped with so much effort, had lost heavily both in men and in equipment and would now be unemployable for a long time to come. It was problematical whether they could be rehabilitated in time to defend the eastern front.[64]

The wholesale destruction of German armor at Kursk, and the subsequent Soviet dash across the Dnieper River, marked the final turn of strategic initiative to the Soviets' advantage. From summer 1942 through summer 1943 the initiative changed hands three times, first with the Soviet winter offensive that sealed the fate of the German Sixth Army in Stalingrad and liberated the Crimea. It then passed back to the Germans in February 1943, as they blunted the Soviet drive to the Dnieper River and retook Kharkov. The German drive toward Kursk, set to begin mid-April, was delayed for more than eight weeks as the armies at the front waited to "receive a substantial allocation of the new Panther and Tiger tanks." [65] The Russians planned to seize the initiative by launching an offensive of their own, but "when [they] learned through their secret agent that Operation Citadel [the German code name for the Kursk offensive] was under way, they immediately abandoned their own plans for an offensive [and] now found such a move far less appealing than to sit back and wait." [66] Their patience paid dividends, as they crushed "the last German attempt at a strategic offensive in the Russian campaign. With its failure the tide of the war in Russia finally turned. . . . The German army was forced onto the defensive and never regained the initiative." [67]

The diplomatic initiatives conducted by the Soviet Union from spring 1942 to the end of 1943 underscore Kursk's role as the turning point. This is clearly visible in two Soviet diplomatic initiatives: first, the Soviet peace initiative in Stockholm in spring and summer 1943; second, the diminished sense of urgency in Stalin's requests for a second front in Europe after summer 1943. During spring and summer 1943, following their successful winter campaign, the Soviets conducted "soundings for a separate peace with Germany through contacts in Stockholm." [68] The Soviet government was most likely shocked into seeking a separate peace because of Manstein's counterattack in early 1943, which recaptured Kharkov. "If the Germans could pull themselves together after a second disastrous winter and carry out such a smashing *counter offensive*, then the road ahead was certain to be a grim one." [69] The Soviets hoped that the blood price paid by the German army in the east would be sufficient to make the German government agree to a peaceful settlement; but it was not. According to Goebbels:

There is a lot of sub rosa talk in the neutral countries about the possibilities of a separate peace with the Soviet Union. . . . Such fear, however, is unwarranted. The Soviet Union will and must be knocked out, no matter how long that may take. The situation is ripe for putting an end to Bolshevism in all Europe, and . . . we can't give up that aim. [70]

The importance of the Soviet peace initiatives to this study is not their success or failure but rather what they reveal about Soviet leaders' views on the situation at the front. The initiatives occurred after the devastating Soviet winter offensive and on the heels of the German



counterstroke at Kharkov, but no peace talks took place after the Russian victory at Kursk. This demonstrates that the Soviet government was more confident of winning the war after Kursk than it was after Stalingrad.

Another yardstick to measure the effect of the Stalingrad and Kursk Campaigns on Soviet leaders is a diminished sense of urgency in Stalin's requests for a second front in Europe. Stalin began his clarion call for a second front in the summer of 1942. In a 23 July communique to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Stalin responded to an announcement that the allies would not invade Europe that year: "I fear the matter is taking an improper turn. . . . I state most emphatically that the Soviet government cannot tolerate the second front in Europe being postponed till 1943." [71] In early August Churchill went to Moscow to explain the allied position. Stalin responded:

It will be readily understood that the British government's refusal to open a second front in Europe in 1942 delivers a moral blow to Soviet public . . . complicates the position of the Red Army at the front and injures the plans of the Soviet High Command. [72]

From December 1942 through January 1943, while the German Sixth Army withered on the vine in Stalingrad, the Soviet premiere urged Churchill to respond to his messages concerning a second front in the spring of 1943. "Assuming that your decisions on Germany are designed to defeat her by opening a second front in Europe in 1943, I should be grateful if you would inform me of the concrete operations planned and their timing." [73] In June 1943, as the Soviets prepared for Kursk, Stalin continued to harangue the allies about further postponement of an invasion of Europe. "Your decision . . . leaves the Soviet Army, which is fighting not only for its country, but also for its allies, to do the job alone, almost single-handed, against an enemy that is still very strong and formidable." [74] But after the Soviet *counter offensive* at Kursk and the string of victories that followed, the Soviet government no longer clamored for a second front. The Soviets were "taking things much more calmly. . . . [It] now began to be taken for granted that the war would be won." [75] Accordingly, Stalin's concerns shifted from opening the second front to insuring a steady flow of supplies from the allies. In October, Stalin wrote:

I have received your message of October 1 informing me of your intention to send four convoys to the Soviet Union by the northern route in November, December, January and February. . . . unless that route is properly used the U.S.S.R. cannot get supplies on the required scale. . . . it would be impermissible to make supplies to the Soviet armies conditional on the arbitrary judgment of the British side. [76]

Examination of the military and diplomatic aspects of the Stalingrad and Kursk Campaigns clearly demonstrates that the turning point in the east occurred with the mass destruction of German armor formations at Kursk, rather than the capitulation of the Sixth Army at Stalingrad. Militarily the Soviet victory at Kursk broke the back of the German army on the eastern front. The losses in men and materiel proved beyond Germany's capacity to replace, while the losses suffered at Stalingrad, though severe, were made good, allowing the Germans to launch their Kursk offensive. Concurrently, there was no net movement of the front to the west as a result of the Soviet victory at Stalingrad. By contrast, the Kursk Campaign resulted in a dramatic shift of the front to the west, pushing it beyond the Dnieper River line deep into the Ukraine. Soviet

diplomatic activities reflected realities at the front. Consequently, despite the success of the Russian winter offensive of 1942, Soviet leadership felt compelled to initiate secret peace talks with the Germans while continuing to pressure the Allies for an immediate invasion of Western Europe. Stalin was aware that Zhukov's victories at Stalingrad and in the Crimea, while impressive, had not been decisive. By comparison, after the German rout at Kursk the Soviets extended no more peace feelers or urgent calls for a second front, because "the Russian command knew that by winning the Battle of Kursk Russia had, in effect, won the war." [77]

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13. Reinhard Gehlen, *The Service: The Memoirs of General Reinhard Gehlen*, trans. David Irving (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1972), 51.

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21. Zhukov, 194.

22. Von Mellenthin, 206.

23. *Ibid.* According to von Mellenthin, on 6 February Hitler traveled to Zaporozhe to meet with Manstein where "tense and prolonged discussions took place." Hitler was opposed to Manstein's withdrawal. Von Mellenthin implies that Paulus's surrender "put the Fuhrer in a more receptive frame of mind . . . (so) he yielded to Manstein's representations."

24. *Ibid.*, 207.

25. Peter Calvocoressi and Guy Wint, *Total War: Causes and Courses of the Second World War* (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), 478.

26. Jukes, 160-61.

27. Albert Seaton, *The German Army 1933-45* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 203.

28. Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970), 325.

29. Guderian, 215.

30. T. N. Dupuy and Paul Martell, *Great Battles on the Eastern Front: The Soviet German War, 1941-1945* (New York: The Bobbsmerrill Company Inc., 1982), 76.

31. *Ibid.*, 76.

32. Martin Caidin, *The Tigers are Burning* (New York: Hawthorn Books Inc., 1974), 74.

33. *Ibid.* The Lucy spy ring comprised ten German World War I veterans who opposed Hitler and Nazism. Their leader, Rudolph Rossler, resided in Switzerland. Eight members of the ring held "vital positions in the armed forces high command (five of them were generals!), and the remaining two became high-ranking officers in the Luftwaffe."

34. *Ibid.*, 109. The author notes, "this is four times heavier than the bristling defenses used at Stalingrad and six times heavier than the mine fields sowed at Moscow."

35. *Ibid.*

36. Dupuy and Martell, 76.

37. Von Mellenthin, 231. The *Panzergruppe* replaced the *Panzerkeil* [tank wedge] as the standard armor formation. The *Panzerkeil* used a spearhead assault made up of medium and heavy tanks to break through enemy defenses.

38. Caidin, 161.

39. Earl F. Ziemke, *Army Historical Series, Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), 135.

40. Guderian, 238.

41. Erickson, 99.

42. *Ibid.*, 103.

43. Caidin, 188-89.

44. Paul Carrell Schmidt, *Scorched Earth: Hitler's War on Russia* vol. 2, trans. Edward Osers (London: George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd., 1970), 78.

45. *Ibid.*, 79.

46. Caidin, 216.

47. Schmidt, 82.

48. Caidin, 218.

49. Dupuy and Martell, 91.

50. *Ibid.*, 93.

51. *Ibid.*

52. *Ibid.*, 94.

53. Zhukov, 255.

54. Gordon Wright, *The Ordeal of Total War, 1939-1945* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1968), 195.

55. Seaton, 196.

56. George H. Stein, *The Waffen SS: Hitler's Elite Guard at War 1939-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), 214-15.

57. Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis and War in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 44.

58. Ziemke, 213.

59. Louis P. Lochner, ed., *The Goebbels Diaries 1942-1943*, trans. Louis P. Lochner (New York: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1948), 493. The losses Goebbels referred to were sustained in the east from 11 October to 20 October, and totaled 54,044 killed, wounded, and missing.

60. Seaton, 206.

61. Bartov, 46.

62. Seaton, 205.

63. Werth, 683. Werth claims "no doubt some of these figures were exaggerated, but even if the Germans lost 2,000 and not 3,000 tanks (and after the war they admitted that their tank forces at Kursk had been virtually frittered away), it was good enough."

64. Guderian, 251.

65. Weinberg, 602.

66. Caidin, 73.

67. Gehlen, 69.

68. Weinberg, 467.

69. *Ibid.*

70. Goebbels, 113.

71. U.S.S.R. Foreign Ministry Commission for the Publication of Diplomatic Documents, *Correspondence Between The Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R. and the Presidents of the USA and the Prime Ministers of Great Britain during the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1957), 61. Hereafter referred to as *Correspondence*.

72. *Ibid.*, 66.

73. *Ibid.*, 94.

74. *Ibid.*, 136-37.

75. Werth, 746.

76. *Correspondence*, 175.

77. Werth, 685.

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